

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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REP. PHIL PFLUM'S STATEHOUSE REPORT

INDIANAPOLIS – As this phase of the 2005 session of the Indiana General Assembly draws to a close, lawmakers are beginning to prepare for the final negotiations on this year's major issues.

On Monday (April 11), the House will complete action on bills sent to that chamber from the Indiana Senate. At the same time, senators will finish work on legislation that came to them from the House.

Our attention then will turn to the conference committee phase of the legislative process. These groups are appointed to resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of a particular bill, but that description does not even begin to detail the various twists and turns that can take place. I will talk about conference committees in more detail in next week's Report.

Two measures certain to end up in conference committees are House Bill 1001, which now contains the Republican Senate's version of the biennial state budget, and House Bill 1120, which outlines a series of Senate Republican measures to help finance the budget.

My concerns about these bills remain unchanged. The Senate Republican budget will cut funding for many schools across Indiana, and force property tax increases throughout the state. House Bill 1120 calls for increases in taxes on cigarettes. Local units will be asked to raise local income taxes in order to pay for future growth in operating expenses for schools and government, leaving them the option to increase either income or property taxes.

Either choice places a greater financial burden on local residents. I will be interested to see how this move to increase taxes will be handled by many lawmakers who campaigned on the pledge they would not raise taxes.

In other action this week, the daylight-saving time issue has revived. A House committee changed Senate Bill 127 to require the time change for 77 counties throughout Indiana, effective June 5, but that measure was amended again on the floor of the House.

In the current version, the switch to daylight-saving time does not take effect until April 2006, and counties in the Eastern Time Zone that are located next to Illinois and the Central Time Zone are given the option of petitioning to opt out of daylight-saving time. In addition, those counties that wish to ask the U.S. Department of Transportation to shift to Central Time will be given the Legislature's blessing.

Concerns have been raised that the language allowing counties to opt out of daylight-saving time would violate federal law. I am sure that these issues will be discussed if Senate Bill 127 passes the House and ends up in a conference committee. If we are to make the time change, I would prefer it to take effect in 2006 rather than this June. Going to daylight-saving time will have a substantial impact on the lifestyle of many families across Indiana, and I believe we need time to properly prepare for the change.

Another measure approved in the House this week would raise the speed limits on interstates and rural four-lane divided highways in Indiana. Representatives changed Senate Bill 217 to increase the interstate limit from 65 to 70 miles per hour and the limit on four-lane highways in rural areas from 55 to 60 mph.

It should be noted that many opponents of this change believe it will increase the chance of accidents and fatalities,

so I am sure SB 217 also will end up in a conference committee.

By a narrow margin, the House approved legislation (Senate Bill 200) that would require students to complete a Core 40 course of study to graduate from high school, starting in the 2010-11 school year. Core 40 requires students to receive credits in a series of advanced courses, including English and language arts, math, science, social studies and foreign languages.

While I support most efforts to prepare our students for the challenges that face them after graduation, I am concerned that it will be very expensive to implement this change at a time when the budget cuts funding for education.

Representatives passed Senate Bill 363, which will increase the salaries of most judges and prosecutors in Indiana by more than 20 percent. Indiana Supreme Court judges will see their yearly pay go from \$115,000 to \$133,600, while the salaries for trial court judges and full-time prosecutors will increase from \$90,000 to \$110,500. These pay increases will be funded through a \$17 increase in court costs for criminal convictions and traffic infractions.

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